

ABSTRACTED FROM A RECENT JIBS DECISION LETTER BY L. EDEN

.....[INTRO REMOVED]

Normally, when two reviewers recommend rejection of a paper, I would follow their advice and reject the paper on the first round. I am recommending a revision here for two reasons: (1) [YOUR TOPIC] is at the heart of international business theory, and (2) JIBS almost never publishes case studies. Therefore, your paper is of *high salience* to JIBS and *high scarcity*.

The key question is whether you will be able to raise the paper to the *level of quality* sufficient for publication in JIBS. All papers published in JIBS must make a substantive contribution to the international business literature on either theoretical and/or (preferably “and”) empirical grounds. If a paper is not empirical, but conceptual or qualitative, the burden of proof must be higher since the typical statistical/econometric contribution is missing and the paper must be judged only on one “leg” instead of two. I do not know whether, in a subsequent revision to the paper, you will be able to do this, but I do want to give you the benefit of the doubt.

I believe there are two key issues that must be addressed in any subsequent revision to this paper. My synopsis of the comments from the reviewers is that their concerns deal with: (1) theory development (Is it new? Is it novel? How does it build on existing theory? What does it contribute? Are the hypotheses testable? Are they novel?), and (2) the appropriateness of the chosen cases, and how well the hypotheses are tested and the robustness (validity tests) of your results. I share these concerns. Let me discuss each in turn.

First, the theory development in the paper needs upgrading, both in terms of incorporating existing literature and in terms of building new theory. [MATERIALS REMOVED HERE]

Second, the paper appears to have been written without following a high-quality case study design methodology. In fact, there are no citations in your paper to any literature on research methodologies for qualitative research.

This issue is of particular salience to me since I am writing this editorial decision letter on the way back from the JIBS 2nd Annual New Frontiers in International Business Research, which was held at Michigan State University, September 16-19. At that conference, I gave the first draft of a paper, “Bringing Cases Back In: Qualitative Research in International Business”. I will send you the presentation, and follow up in about 10 days with the full paper.

In writing that paper, I did an extensive review of the literature on research methodologies in the social sciences, focusing on qualitative methods – in particular, case studies – in political science, organization studies and management. The key works on case studies, in my opinion, are by Yin¹, Eisenhardt², and George³. I would also draw your attention to the new book that is just out from Edward Elgar on qualitative research methods in international business research.⁴

As these authors show, because qualitative researchers do not have the large-N datasets on which they can test theories using statistical and/or econometric methods, it is difficult to build theories with falsifiable hypotheses and to test these hypotheses, given the small N-samples typical of case study research. Yin discusses how to design a robust case study and the various validity tests that can be used, taking either an inductive or deductive approach. Eisenhardt argues strongly for an inductive, theory building approach where the theory comes from close examination of rich case studies. George, on the other hand, argues for a deductive, theory testing and building approach where the author builds theory from the existing literature, develops testable hypotheses and uses a tightly controlled (“structured focused”) comparison

across and within the cases to test the hypotheses. The new handbook on qualitative research in IB takes more of an inductive approach, like Eisenhardt. All these authors discuss validity tests (e.g., internal, external, construct validity) that must be used to ensure the robustness of the case study outcomes.

My own work using case studies follows most closely on George's methodology, but I must admit that after having written the paper for the JIBS Frontiers Conference, that my two papers are not sufficiently rigorous by today's standards.⁵ However, a paper that did exactly follow the case study research method outlined by one of these authors (your paper appears to best fit George's structured focused comparison method), would be a valuable addition to the international business literature.

.....[REMAINDER OF LETTER REMOVED]

¹ Yin, Robert K. 1993. Applications of Case Study Research. Applied Social Research Methods Series. Volume 34. Newbury Park, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Yin, Robert K. 1998. "The Abridged Version of Case Study Research: Design and Method." In L. Bickman and D. J. Rog, eds. Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yin, Robert K. 2003. Case Study Research: Design and Methods (3rd edition). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

² Eisenhardt, Kathleen M. 1989. Building theories from case study research. Academy of Management Review, 14, 532-550.

Eisenhardt, Kathleen M. 1991. Better stories and better constructs: The case for rigor and comparative logic. Academy of Management Review, 16.3 (July): 620-627.

Eisenhardt, Kathleen M. 1995. "Building Theories from Case Study Research," Longitudinal Field Research Methods, pp. 65-90.

³ George, Alexander. 1979. "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison, in P.G. Lauren, Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy (New York: Free Press), pp. 43-68.

George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett. 2004. Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences. Boston, MA: MIT Press. Early versions of several of the book chapter are posted here: <http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/bennetta/>.

George, Alexander and Timothy J. McKeown. 1985. "Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision-Making," in R. F. Coulam and R. A. Smith, eds., Advances in Information Processing in Organizations, Vol. 2 (Greenwich: JAI Press), pp. 21-58.

George, Alexander L. and William E. Simons (eds.) 1994. The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy. Second Edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

⁴ Marschan-Piekkari and Welch (2004) Handbook on Qualitative Research Methods for International Business, Edward Elgar Publishing.

⁵ Eden, Lorraine and Maureen Appel Molot. 2002. Insiders, Outsiders and Host Country Bargains. Journal of International Management.

Lorraine Eden, Tina Dacin and William Wan. 2001. Standards across Borders: Diffusion of the Arm's Length Standard in North America. Accounting, Organizations and Society 26: 1-23.